

# MYRIAD BABES OF THE MIKADO'S EMPIRE

## How Ages Are Reckoned—Flying Fish for Birthdays—Boys Preferred to Girls—Japanese Children Cry.

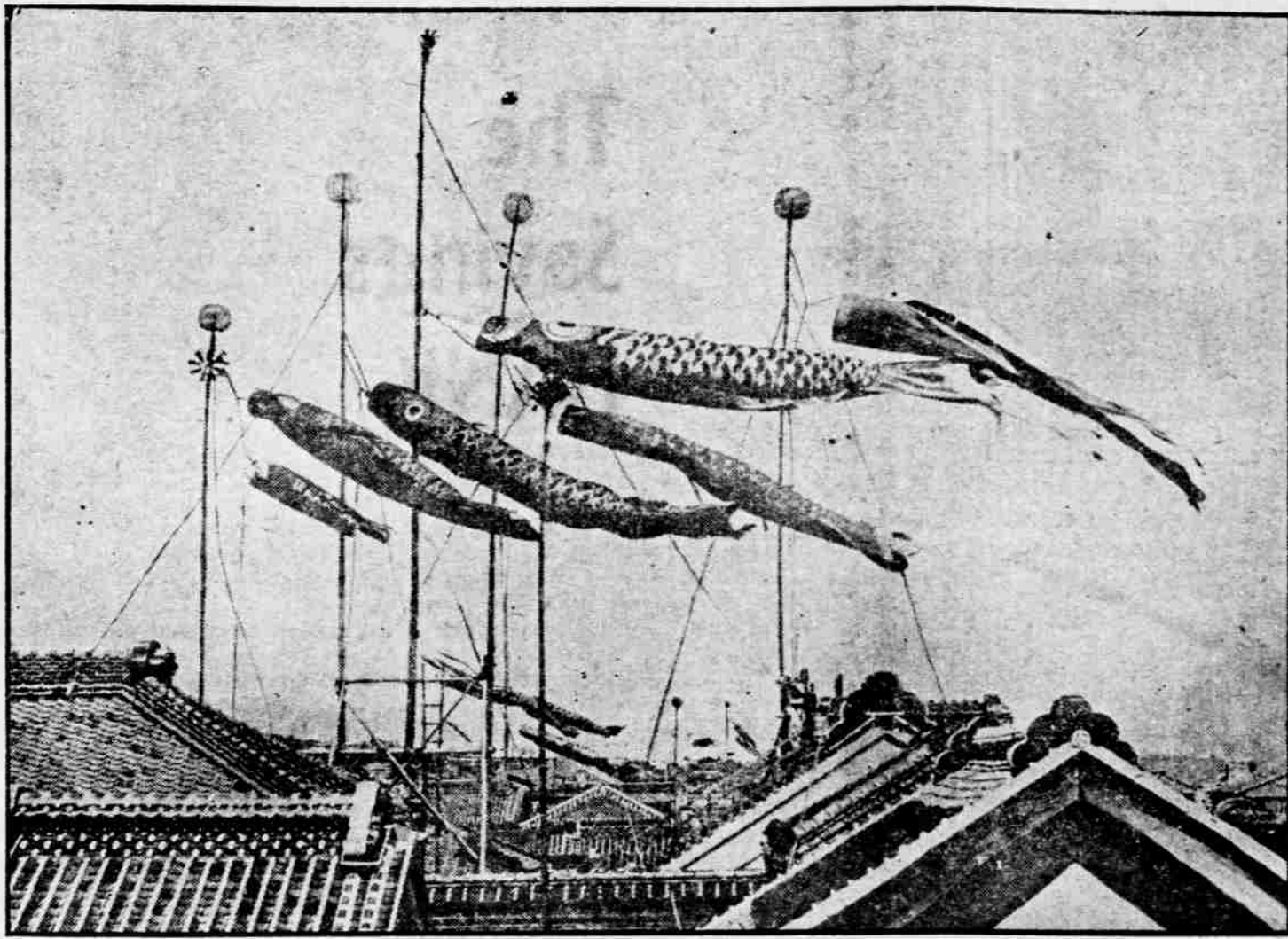
TOKIO—When I began to outline the topics I would include in my series from Japan a lady said to me, "Why don't you write a story about the babies? There is no subject that appeals to women more than children; there could not be more entertaining reading than an account of the curious juvenile customs of the Japanese." After all the babies of this country really are its main attraction. The cherry blossoms appear at times and the temples may be seen in places, but the youngsters are everywhere on all occasions. What delights the tourist more than the hosts of gaily attired tots who, no matter where he may come upon them, seem always to be grouped in unconscious grace as if posing for a picture.

The Japanese have a queer way of reckoning the age of their young. As soon as a baby is born it is said to be a year old. It is regarded as such until its first anniversary when it becomes two years old, this deception continuing throughout its life. American women beginning to mellow with age would doubtless look with disfavor upon this custom of assenting to an extra year—it even being charged that some of them, like May Irwin in "Mrs. Black is Back," deliberately shorten their lives by discarding a few years now and then—but here in Japan, where time does not seem to lay heavy upon anyone, there is no disadvantage to the individual because the deceit is universal. This odd practice doubtless had its origin in the Oriental habit of adding one for every fraction. When you stop to consider the matter seriously it really is quite an economy in book-keeping to credit yourself with a year rather than to bother with trifles like months and days.

### THE NATIONAL BIRTHDAY.

Some of the Japanese parents reckon the age of their male children from the first national birthday occurring after their advent. This general anniversary for boys is another custom distinctly Japanese. Instead of each boy being permitted to celebrate in his own way on the actual day of his birth, he must needs deny himself the pleasure of an individual demonstration and make common joy with the throng on the fifth day of the fifth month. Should his first glimpse of the world chance to occur on this particular day, he is just in time to celebrate, but if he misses this date by a few days or weeks or months, he has to worry along until the next annual, when he can ratify to his heart's content in company with all his fellows. If this restrictive idea, tending as it does to the concentration of celebratory inclination, should spread to the United States and be applied to that portion of our population which leans to convivial indulgence, there would be an outburst of much pent-up enthusiasm when, on the morning of the annual American Drinking Day, the band begins to play "There'll be a Hot Time in the Old Town Tonight."

On the morning of the boys' birthday in Japan a tall pole is mounted in front of each home wherein a male child has been born during the year. The top of this pole is ornamented by a fancy piece of basket work. In addition to this wicker ball there is suspended, in the same manner that a flag is attached to a staff, a large paper or cloth fish. This figure is symbolic. It represents the carp which has the strength and endurance to contend against the current of the stream for many years. By the same sign the boy is to become sturdy and long-lived. An iron ring or wooden hook is placed in the mouth of the fish so that the air can fill it. As the breeze plays with it the motion is as natural as if it were alive and swimming in the water. If there are a number of boys in a family a fish is added to the string for every one. In some places the lads are so numerous that the air is brilliant with a whole school of immense flying carp.



DECORATION FOR BOY'S BIRTHDAY.

### FUTURE DEFENDERS OF THE FLAG.

At this time the toy stores do a thriving business, the miniatures of soldiers and wrestlers being in great demand. Spears, guns, flags and all the equipments of warriors and men of strength are represented in the playthings, so that the little ones may have early object lessons to stimulate their spirit of ardor and conquest. Older children flock to parties, picnics and festivals. The streets are bright with color as the many juvenile parades pass through them. The little marchers are equipped with caps and sashes and some of them carry banners. The national martial spirit is shown in the military make-up of the boys, the parks being the scene of drills by many companies of small troops. They execute their evolutions with an accuracy that would do credit to real soldiers. If Japan is to wage many wars as costly as the present one, these little fighters are learning the way of the bloody game none too soon.

During the Feast of Dolls, which occurs the first week in March, the little Japanese girls have their holiday. It is at this period that the entire family takes a recess and gives itself over to pleasure. All don their best attire and hospitality is dispensed right and left. The family treasures are brought forth and exhibited, particularly the dolls of mothers and grandmothers which are kept in mysterious hiding at all other times. In many of these collections are tiny figures of the Emperor, Empress and lesser personages of the nobility, all dressed accurately and expensively. It is etiquette to arrange these images in the order of their rank and spread repasts before them. Food and drink are arranged on exquisite little lacquer tables with toy dishes and furnishings. Among the wealthy classes these playthings often represent great intrinsic value, but they are treasured far more highly because they have been the property of other generations. The family whose fortunes have been depleted will dispense with everything it possesses before it will part with its stock of manikins.

### BOYS ARE LIKED BEST.

Japanese boys are thought more of by their parents than the girls, because the Oriental man holds himself superior to woman. This shows itself in many ways. If husband and wife are walking in the street, the man goes in front and if there are bundles to carry the woman looks after them. A few days ago I sat down to dinner with two American girls at a hotel in a country village. The Japanese waitress was very particular to give me the largest piece of meat and the best looking apple—not that she sized me up as being a hearty eater, but because I was a man and therefore, (in her estimation) entitled to the best treatment. The manner in which little girls are pressed into service to carry babies often weighing nearly half as much as themselves, while their stout brothers run about and play, is another illustration of partiality in favor of the sterner sex. It is no wonder these patient little pack-horses grow to be hump-backed women. If a little girl has no baby brother or sister her parents frequently rent her services to neighbors who have small charges that they desire to be rid of during the day. She frequently performs double duty, namely, carrying the baby while she does some other kind of work. An employee in a tea firing house told me that he knew of several cases like this. The heat of the room where the tea was fired was so intense that, combined with the exceeding hot weather, it made the atmosphere of the room unbearable for more than a few minutes at a time, yet the girls went in and out at their work with the babies strapped on their backs, the helpless mites taking the sweat baths with their guardians and napping between times.

### JAPANESE BABIES CAN CRY.

The oft-repeated statement that Japanese babies do not cry is incorrect. I have seen more than one take a tumble and their lung power under the provocation of a bumped head is as vociferous as the small fry of any western nationality. And they have plenty of temper. The other day as a procession passed, our servant's four-year-old started for the street in a gallop. When his mother called him he did not say "shikata ga nai" (the famous Japanese expression meaning it doesn't matter). He screamed his wrath and disappointment at the top of his voice and jumped up and down till the splinters fairly flew from his wooden clogs. But it is true that the Jap baby does not cry so frequently as one of our children. It takes more to get him under way, but when he makes a start at crying he is not an amateur by any means.

I have asked a number of ladies why the Oriental is more passive than his Occidental cousin. They do not consider it the same trait that prompts the aboriginal to bear pain with stoicism, but the reserve which is inherent to the Japanese. It is dignity rather than bravado. A school room filled with children of the aristocracy is as solemn as a court levy. These little people enter and depart with the same serious demeanor that marks the deportment of their elders. They do not giggle nor throw paper wads. If they feel the buoyancy and mischievousness which characterizes the disposition of young Americans, it is so well under control that they would no more think of showing it than a diplomat would allow himself to manifest anger while negotiating a treaty.

### MUST KNOW NO EVIL.

The Japanese adage that one must speak no evil, see no evil, hear no evil, is taught the children from their infancy. Over the temple door are three monkey images in different attitudes. One has its hands over its mouth, another over its eyes and still another over its ears. This object lesson in ignoring evil is explained to the youngsters during his wide-eyed,

question-asking age and he is reminded of the monkeys so often that his curiosity is soon in subjection. This early training no doubt contributes to his passiveness of manner and adds to his passiveness of temperament. It is considered impolite to manifest surprise, no matter what one may see. This principle allows the poor family to take its bath in sight of the street without scandalizing the neighborhood. If no one is shocked there need be on one embarrassed! This comforting logic acts in lieu of window blinds. It is amusing to observe the children at the temple. The other day I noticed a wee girl climbing up the long stone steps. She held a copper coin clinched tightly in one chubby fist. Approaching close to the railing before the cash box she balanced herself carefully and tossed her money between the slats. Then she grasped the rope which disturbs the drum overhead and aroused the echoes with all her Lilliputian strength. She seemed impressed with the necessity of making plenty of noise in order to attract the attention of the god. When satisfied in this respect she composed herself for a moment, made a brief prayer, then made off in great haste. I was anxious to know what sort of supplication she could have made, so my companion, having a knowledge of the language, agreed to question her. What sort of petition do you suppose she offered to the god? She wanted her mother cured of headache! Children are not allowed to pray for good things to eat, nor to ask for anything to promote pleasure. The deities are only appealed to for relief from want, distress or trouble.

### WHY THE WIDOW MOVED.

The Japanese capacity for imitation reveals itself in the play of the children. A widow with several small boys decided to move because of some bad children who frequented the neighborhood where she was residing. She could not keep the boys in the house so she determined to locate near a temple where outside influences would be good. The day after the family moved into the new quarters there was a large funeral at the temple and the boys looked on in open-mouthed astonishment throughout the entire length of the showy ceremonial. Not a single detail escaped their sharp eyes, as was proved next day when they rehearsed the whole performance. They imitated with whatever properties they could lay their hands upon.

They managed to make satisfactory substitutions for everything but the corpse. It seemed to them that it would not do to proceed with the last sad rites until they had something which was really dead, so they proceeded to kill a neighbor's dog, after which the funeral proceeded with due solemnity. The owner of the canine who played the star part at the obsequies made such a row about the affair that the widow decided to move again. She next located near a theatre. As might be expected, the boys soon embarked in the show business on their own account. In imitating the scene from a tragedy one of them became so realistic that he almost chopped his brother's ear off with an old sword. The widow would like to move again, but she is afraid to risk it.

### HASKIN FINDS A FRIEND.

How true it is that the sure way to reach people's hearts is through their children. I am an alien among a people whose language I do not understand and whose ways are strange to me, yet I have made friends with a family by presenting the diminutive son and heir with a cent's worth of chewing gum. It was the remainder of the last treat I gave a little friend of mine before leaving America. The tailor found it in my pocket and returned it as gravely as if it were a green-back. I commend him for his honesty, because it has procured for me what money could not buy. Every day when I take my walk little Yosita is waiting for me at the well by the bamboo fence. He is the cutest kimono kid who ever wore a wooden clog. We cannot talk to each other, but we are in no need of an interpreter. He listens to my watch tick, tries on my glasses, then proceeds to pick my pockets before my very eyes. The candy is always in a different place but Yosita has found it every time. His father gave me the last bunch of cherry blossoms from the family tree, which was a fine act of courtesy for him to pay. By this sign I know he is my friend—that is why I said the stray piece of chewing gum procured for me what money could not buy.

FREDERIC J. HASKIN.

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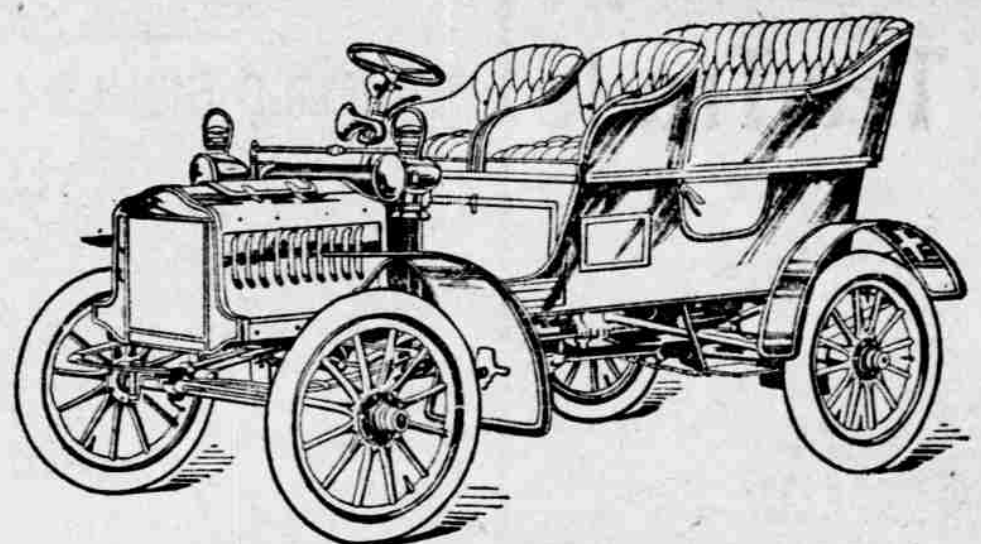
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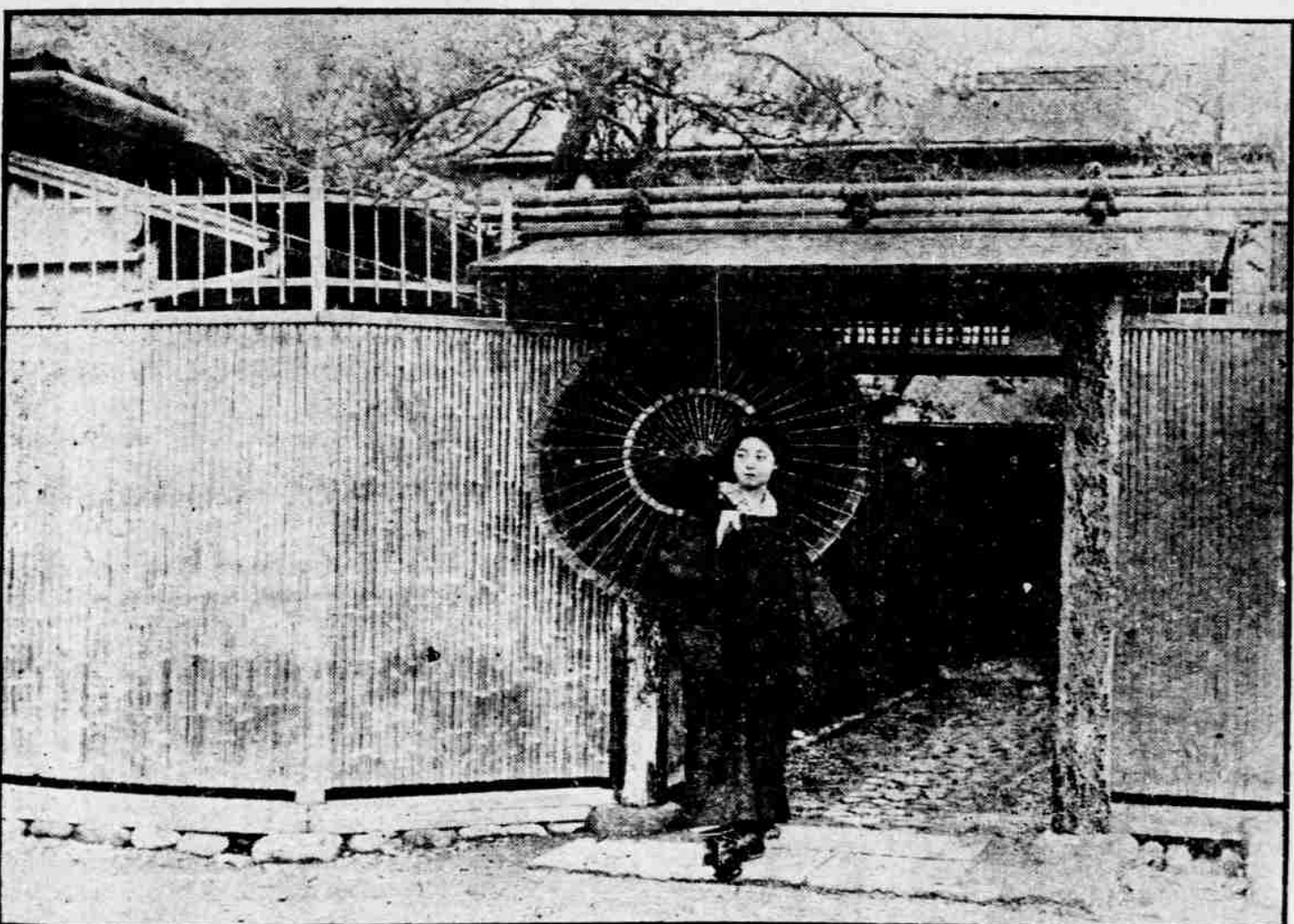
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